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ABSTRACT

Although several different definitions of prejudice, discrimination, and racism have been proposed, there is a general consensus about the essential meaning of these concepts. Previous research has indicated that the attitudes people in the United States have toward Arabs are derived from ignorance of the Arab culture. This study measured current college student attitudes toward Arabs. The Situational Attitudes Scale-Arab (SAS-Arab) version was administered to a random sample of university freshmen (N=112) at fall orientation. The SAS assesses attitudes and stereotypes directed toward a particular group using items describing various situational contexts. Data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance. The results indicated that students held more negative attitudes in response to situations involving an Arab individual than in response to identical situations involving a neutrally identified person. These negative attitudes and stereotypes toward Arabs have implications for the campus environment. By bringing research and programming affecting the lives of Arab students to the forefront, student affairs professionals can take the leadership that is necessary at many institutions to provide a multicultural and equitable educational environment for all students. (Author/ABL)

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SUMMARY

The Situational Attitude Scale-Arab version (SAS-Arab) was administered to a random sample of 112 university freshmen at fall orientation. The SAS assesses attitudes and stereotypes directed toward a particular group using items describing various situational contexts. Data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance. Results indicated that students held more negative attitudes in response to situations involving an Arab individual than in identical situations involving a neutrally identified person.

These negative attitudes and stereotypes toward Arabs have implications for the campus environment. Programs and educational interventions designed to reduce these stereotypes and to change attitudes were discussed.

Although several different definitions of prejudice, discrimination, and racism have been proposed, there is a general consensus about the essential meaning of these concepts (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986). For example, one of the earliest and most popular definitions of prejudice is an "antipathy based on a faulty or inflexible generalization" felt or expressed, and directed toward a group as a whole or toward an individual member of that group (Allport, 1954). Several researchers still ascribe to Allport's general framework of the origins of prejudice (e.g., Ashmore, 1970; Jones, 1986).

Allport also proposed that stereotypes develop in order to rationalize or justify one's prejudice and discriminatory acts. Ashmore & DelBoca (1981) go further to propose that the historical development and perpetuation of stereotypes may be viewed as consequences of three classes of processes: (1) motivational processes in which stereotypes are viewed as serving the intrapsychic needs of the perceiver; (2) socio-cultural processes, including socialization, social reinforcement, and media influence, which focus on the role of social learning in the acquisition and maintainence of stereotypical beliefs; and 3) cognitive processes and structures which influence the development of perceptions of social groups.

Using the sociocultural orientation framework, it is reasonable to assume that stereotypes change over time based on such processes as current socialization practices, media influences, and societal changes. For example, Dovidio and Gaertner (1986) cite that Whites' stereotypes of Blacks have

changed considerably since 1932. One example they cited is that negative descriptors such as "superstitious, lazy, or ignorant" are currently less often selected by Whites to describe Blacks. The authors have also noted that Whites are becoming more liberal in their attitudes towards Blacks, due in part to a more positive portrayal in the mass media.

One group that currently appears to be suffering considerable prejudice and stereotyping, probably based in part on media influences and societal changes in this country, are Arabs and Arab-Americans. Employment of a sociocultural approach can provide a good framework for understanding current attitudes toward Arabs.

The term "Arab" referred in pre-Islamic times to the people who inhabited the Arabian Peninsula and the Syrian desert. In addition, numerous Arab and Western scholars have struggled to answer the question of "Who is an Arab"? (Patai, 1973). The answers usually include the criteria of those who speak Arabic, are brought up in the Arab culture, live in an Arab country, and "cherish the memory of the Arab empire" (Patai, 1973; p.13).

Moracco (1983) remarked that the Arab Middle East has traditionally held minimal interest to Westerners. Furthermore, Arabs were viewed as having lived outside history and were largely ignored (Leuchtenburg, 1977; Suleiman, 1982). However, these attitudes changed abruptly in the fall of 1973 when Arab states cut back oil production and embargoed oil shipments to the United States. The oil crisis perceptibly changed the way in which the Arabs were portrayed in the media. The media have frequently caricatured Arabs as antagonists who are threats to

U.S. peace, politics, and economic security, thus perpetrating negative stereotypes (Gilboa, 1985; Slade, 1981). Almaney and Alwan (1982; p. 111) further remark that "no single factor has conditioned the average Westerner's attitude toward the Arabs as the communication media have".

One example of these attitudes was found in the results of a study conducted by Slade (1981) in which a representative random sample of U.S. citizens was polled, revealing the existence of several negative Arab stereotypes. A large percentage (44%) of respondents felt that Arabs could be described as "barbaric and cruel", "treacherous, cunning" (49%), and "warlike and bloodthirsty" (50%).

In general, it is felt that most of the stereotypes that people in the U.S. have toward Arabs are derived from ignorance of Arab culture (Moracco, 1982; Patai, 1973).

Recognition that there may be prejudice or stereotyping of particular groups is important in order to reduce potential conflicts that may arise when different cultures interact (Stovall & Sedlacek, 1983). This type of recognition is particularly important on large, ethnically diverse university campuses. Furthermore, given that the number of Arab students in U.S. universities is increasing, it is particularly important to understand these students within a cultural context (Meleis, 1982). The purpose of this study was to measure current student attitudes toward Arabs.

Method

Instrument: The Situational Attitude Scale as originally

developed (SAS; Sedlacek & Brooks, 1970; 1972) is composed of 10 personal and social situations. Each situation, which represents an instance in which race was found to be important in an individual's reaction to the situation, is followed by 10 bipolar semantic differential scales.

Two forms are used for administration. The original two forms, A and B, are identical except that the word "Black" is inserted in each situation in Form B (e.g., "A man asks your sister to marry him" vs. "A Black man asks your sister to marry him".) Both forms are administered randomly to a group, and differences in mean responses on the bipolar scales for each situation are attributed to the racial attitudes of that group. Other forms of the SAS have been developed to measure attitudes toward women (Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1983), Hispanics (White & Sedlacek, 1987), older people (Peabody & Sedlacek, 1983), and people with physical disabilities (Stovall & Sedlacek, 1983).

The SAS was adapted for the purposes of assessing student attitudes toward Arabs. Form A contains 10 neutral situations, and Form B is comprised of the identical 10 situations except with the stimulus word "Arab" inserted. These situations were developed from a study of relevant literature and media depictions of people of Arab descent. Items were developed to represent instances in which Arab ethnicity might be a salient variable in people's perceptions of the situation. All items were then tested in a pilot study before being utilized in the final measure.

Procedure: The SAS-Arab was completed anonymously by 112 incoming university freshmen during fall orientation (58% female;

42% male). The two forms were distributed so that each student had an approximately equal chance of receiving either form; 53 students completed form A, and 59 completed Form B. Participants were not aware that two separate forms existed.

Reliability: Reliabilities were calculated for each of 10 situational items. The alpha coefficients ranged from .71 to .91, with a median of .84.

Validity: The validity of the SAS was determined by the mean response differences between Form A and Form B, using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) at the .05 level. Construct validity for the SAS-Arab is indicated by significant differences in the predicted direction between Forms A and B. These differences can be attributed only to the stimulus word "Arab", since the two forms were randomly distributed and were identical in all other respects.

Results

Seven of the ten items on the SAS were significantly different when compared across Forms A and B (see Table 1). Participants responded that they would feel more negative if a new Arab person joined their social group than if a new "person" joined. Responses to this item suggested that participants felt colder, more threatened, displeased, and suspicious when a new social group member was Arab. They also reported that they would be more surprised, angry, shocked, and would feel bad if they heard of an Arab student getting financial aid compared to hearing of a "student" doing so.

One item solicited students' feelings about seeing an on-

campus demonstration. Negative emotions, such as suspicion, tension, hatred, and indifference were more often reported when it was indicated that the demonstration was staged by Arab students than when the demonstrators were unidentified. Students also indicated that they would feel more disgusted, negative, sad, angry, and hopeless if they noticed an Arab student cheating on an exam than if they noticed an unidentified student cheating. They felt that they would be more fearful, sad, and suspicious if required to attend an Islamic religious service as a class requirement than if they were required to attend a religious service of an unspecified denomination.

Participants felt more negative toward an item which described Arab fathers receiving custody of their children than they did about an item in which "fathers" received custody. Feelings that participants associated with this item included sadness, fear, discomfort, hate, and shock. Finally, participants felt more negatively about boarding a plane with two young Arab men than they did about boarding with "two young men." They associated feelings of fear, lack of safety, tension, anger, and suspicion with travelling by air with Arab men.

Discussion

The results of this study provide evidence that there are measurable negative attitudes among students toward people of Arab descent. Seven of ten items on the SAS-Arab yielded significant results, suggesting that attitudes toward Arabs were more negative than toward unspecified individuals.

Students felt more negative about Arabs in a variety of situations. These included situations with which students could

easily identify, such as an item which suggested that an Arab was joining the student's social group, and items in which the situation was academically-related. Other items on the SAS-Arab appeared to have tapped into more general attitudinal stereotypes held about Arabs. Situations which described boarding a plane with Arabs, or child custody being assigned to an Arab father, reflect the stereotypical images of of Arab terrorism, untrustworthiness, and religious fanaticism (Slade, 1981).

The results of this study have implications for a variety of student affairs areas. First, the SAS-Arab is useful in the documentation of racism as it occurs toward this group of people. Simply inquiring as to whether people hold negative attitudes toward a group of individuals is unlikely to yield accurate and nondefensive responses, since racism tends to be considered a socially undesirable trait (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1972). Secondly, the SAS goes one step further in clarifying racist attitudes by identifying the situational contexts in which negative attitudes are most likely to be expressed. This information is useful in planning programs which are aimed at increasing tolerance and attitudinal acceptance of members of culturally different groups. For example, the data from the current study indicate that one useful point of intervention might involve situations in which a high level of personal contact with Arabs is typical, or in academically-related situations, such as in residence halls or classroom environments. Other programs might target the stereotypical images held by students about Arabs. An example of such an educational program might include a multi-cultural

awareness week, in which students can be exposed to the cultural traditions of various racial/ethnic groups that are represented on campus. These findings and interventions are particularly timely in light of the current politico-social attitudes and trends between the United States and several Arab nations which are reflected in negative depictions of Arabs in the popular media (Gilboa, 1985).

Several approaches designed to reduce or eliminate racism toward Arab students are possible. Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) have developed a six-stage approach to reducing racist attitudes. The stages are: (1) Understanding racial and cultural differences; (2) Understanding racism; (3) Examining racial attitudes; (4) Understanding and identifying the sources of racial attitudes; (5) Setting goals; and (6) Developing strategies. The results of this study would be particularly valuable in stages 4 and 5 of this model and could be discussed as a part of a larger program dealing with racism toward people of Arab descent. The Sedlacek-Brooks model is designed for use in workshops and group settings.

A second approach to racism reduction training is coursework designed to meet this goal. Roper and Sedlacek (1988) discussed a course on racism taught by student affairs professionals. By concentrating on information, attitudes, and behaviors of students, they found that change in all three areas was possible.

A final application of the results of this study involves work with Arab students. There is evidence that the ability of minority students to understand and deal with racism is positively correlated with their grades and retention in school

(Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987; 1988). Parham and Helms (1985) suggest that positive or negative self-concept of Black students may be mediated by their mechanisms for coping with the Black experience. The work of Parham and Helms (1985) in assessing the racial identity of students could also be helpful in promoting these goals. Through programs in orientation, student activities, counseling, career development, and other student affairs areas, significant differences in the lives of Arab students could be brought about. Westbrook & Sedlacek (1988) discuss a workshop designed to train student affairs professionals to deal with these complex issues.

Finally, the results of the current study point the way for future research which might further investigate the nature of the stereotypes which were indicated in this study. For example, do people make finer distinctions between people of Arab descent, such as between Iranians and Iraqis, or do these stereotypes seem to generalize to all "Arabs"? Are the situational contexts in which people perceive Arabs negatively stable, or do they change over time and with changes in the political climate? These and other questions await further research.

By bringing research and programming affecting the lives of Arab students to the forefront, student affairs professionals can take the leadership that is necessary at many institutions that will help us to truly provide a multicultural and equitable educational environment for all students.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Items by Form

Items	Form A (Neutral) Mean	Form A (Neutral) S.D.	Form B (Arab) Mean	Form B (Arab) S.D.
1. You are standing on a very crowded bus surrounded by many (Arab) people.	33.41	5.30	31.42	6.56
2. You are going on vacation with your best friend and his/her (Arab) friend of the opposite sex.	34.81	6.62	34.29	7.43
3. You are boarding a plane for a vacation in Florida, and two young (Arab) men are boarding immediately behind you.*	36.22	4.98	30.54	7.24
4. You are buying a used car from a (an Arab) salesman.	31.85	5.66	31.62	8.37
5. You are watching a television program about divorced (Arab) fathers being given custody of their children.*	34.17	5.35	31.83	4.86
6. You are required to attend a (an Islamic) religious service for a school research project.*	34.71	8.72	30.88	7.39
7. You notice a (an Arab) student cheating on an exam.*	30.31	6.57	25.32	5.15

8. You see a group of (Arab) students staging an on-campus demonstration against discrimination.*	36.25	6.98	32.62	7.33
9. You hear of a (an Arab) student getting financial aid.*	39.06	7.26	34.73	6.79
10. A new (Arab) person joins your social group.*	36.51	6.02	33.68	6.81

Note. Form B (Arab) included the words in parentheses; Form A (Neutral) did not.
Scale ranges: 50=most positive attitudes; 10=most negative attitudes
*$p < .05$